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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 11, 1959



MEMORANDUM OF DISCUSSION WITH THE PRESIDENT
(Monday, March 9, 1959 at 8:30 a.m.)

1. I reported to the President that in circulating the draft Record of Actions with respect to NSC 5904, which the President had approved at the Council meeting of 5 March, there had developed some difficulties. In the first place the State Department member had a different understanding of the Presidential decision with respect to some of the language and objectives than other Council members; and in the second place, the Defense Department and the JCS had had some second thoughts and were recommending language which seemed to me not to reflect the agreement at the meeting. I pointed out that additionally, the State Department wished to add some clarifying language which I thought was acceptable. I recommended to the President that rather than go over the language with him in this Conference, we reschedule the paper for the NSC meeting of March 12 for final consideration in view of the importance of the policy with which the paper was concerned. He approved this recommendation saying that he had enjoyed and benefitted from the discussion in the March 5 meeting and that he would be interested to know what remaining differences there were in the views of his principal advisers.

2. I then discussed the Berlin and German situation with the President. I said to him that I had felt that the Special Meeting on March 5 had not been too successful although the principal issues were substantially exposed. I told him that it seemed to me that the reasons why the meeting accomplished less than I had desired were: (a) the large number of people attending the meeting (16 in number), (b) less than adequate preparation for the meeting and (c) the conduct of the meeting.

I pointed out that as to (c), I had prepared an agenda for the meeting in concert with Mr. Herter, Mr. Merchant and Mr. Smith and Mr. Quarles but that we had strayed a good deal. I indicated that I felt that a great deal of time was taken in the meeting to discuss the proposed conferences with legislative leaders.

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.2M

MR 80-666 #13
By D.J.H. Date 1/5/81

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I told the President that Mr. McElroy had called me following the meeting and had expressed his lack of satisfaction with the results of the meeting. Mr. McElroy had suggested to me that there be another meeting with the President attended by Mr. Herter, Mr. Merchant, Mr. McElroy, Mr. Quarles, General Twining and Gordon Gray (plus such limited other State Department personnel as Mr. Herter wished to bring) to consider some of the principal unsolved issues. Mr. McElroy had suggested that this group meet in advance of such a meeting with the President to "mature" the problems. I told the President that it was planned to have the first of such small meetings on the afternoon of March 9. Then when ready, the group would ask for a further meeting with him towards the end of the week.



The President thought well of this procedure. He said that he was still confused as to what we would do under certain contingencies.

3. I then told the President that this discussion lead us to a question for which I needed an answer. Would the President wish Berlin and Germany dealt with in the NSC (of course with adequate preparation in such meetings as had been suggested by Mr. McElroy). The President indicated that he would wish these problems dealt with in the Council but only after such preparations had been taken as were involved in the McElroy suggestion. He said that as a regular thing, once policy had been settled, he would expect that each week the DCI. would simply indicate material changes in the situation.

4. I then discussed briefly with the President the question of the role of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs generally. I said that I had understood from General Cutler and had assumed during my own incumbency that the President expected the Special Assistant to concern himself with problems involving National Security Affairs generally and not simply those matters which were specifically before the National Security Council. He indicated that he agreed with this notion on the ground that it would be impossible to carry on the work of the Council otherwise. I indicated to the President that I understood that he must have had a good reason for not wishing me to attend the two legislative meetings on March 6, but that it was important for me to keep abreast of such developments.

I then raised the question with the President of whether it would be desirable for the Special Assistant to brief the President in advance of

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Council meetings with respect to papers coming before the Council involving points of controversy. I told him that I had understood that this had been a practice in the early days of General Cutler's service, which had been largely abandoned toward the end. The President said that in the beginning General Cutler had briefed him in great detail on papers, including the most inconsequential language splits and that he had abandoned this practice. However, he felt that the Special Assistant should make a determination as to which papers needed some Presidential exposure in advance of the meeting and that he would be glad to discuss those.



Gordon Gray
Special Assistant to the President



cc: Mr. Lay

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